

PRESS RELEASE



The Cleveland Museum of Art

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FOR RELEASE ON RECEIPT

THE CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART HAS PURCHASED A MAJOR WORK BY JACKSON POLLOCK

The Cleveland Museum of Art has purchased the painting Number 5, 1950 by Jackson Pollock (1912-1956), filling a gap in its collection of American Abstract Expressionist art. This important painting was purchased directly from The Museum of Modern Art in New York. The Museum of Modern Art decided to sell Number 5, 1950, one of four major paintings from Pollock's fully mature period that it owned, to a major American museum desirous of acquiring an important Pollock in order to help defray the cost of acquiring ten works from the Pollock estate (some by gift) covering various periods in Pollock's life.

"For some time The Cleveland Museum of Art has wanted to add a major work by Jackson Pollock," explained Sherman E. Lee, director of the Museum. "We have a good representative collection of American Abstract Expressionists, but until now had lacked a work by this seminal figure. We have purchased a painting by an artist whose work we have long wanted in our collection, and as a result of the direct sale The Museum of Modern Art will be able to acquire a number of Pollock works giving it a full representation of Pollock's career," he concluded.

Pollock died in 1956 at age forty-four in an automobile accident, and the freely painted abstractions for which he is best known were painted between 1947 and his death. His peak accomplishments however are generally acknowledged to have come in and around 1950. Although he is most widely known for his mural-sized canvases, most of his paintings are smaller. Number 5, 1950, while not one of the artist's giant works, is of substantial size (53-3/4 by 39 inches) and is a very fine painting from Pollock's most significant period. As early as 1951 the late Thomas Hess in

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his book Abstract Painting, Background and American Phase mentions Number 5, 1950 and another work Number 1, 1949, in connection with Pollock's technical innovations. "In working on these pictures, Pollock often placed them on the floor to attack the over-all whirlpool of rhythm more directly. Finally the canvas started and remained on its back; the painter gave up the comparatively slow action of the brush applying pigment to the surface for the rapid flow of enamel dripped and thrown. . . ."

Born in Cody, Wyoming, and raised in California, Pollock's works exemplify the honest directness associated with the character of the American Westerner. He studied with Thomas Hart Benton and the dynamic vigor of that artist is echoed in Pollock's own paintings, even though his aesthetic concerns and mature style are quite different from those of his teacher.

Robert Motherwell, Willem de Kooning, and other American artists have acknowledged Pollock's importance; de Kooning once remarking that his friend had "opened the door" for other artists. By this, he referred to Pollock's method of beginning a painting with spontaneous movements of his arm and body directed by inner feelings. These emotions, moods, and thoughts were in turn inspired responses to the original marks that he made on the canvas. The composition developed during the process of painting. Pollock painted as he drew, directly and freely. As he once remarked: "When I am in my painting I'm not aware of what I'm doing. It is only after a sort of 'get acquainted' period that I see what I have been about. . . .It is only when I lose contact with the painting that the result is a mess. Otherwise there is pure harmony, an easy give and take, and the painting comes out well."

Ironically, when paintings such as Pollock's Number 5, 1950, were created, many people accused the artist of carelessness and thought his paintings lacked form. These same works now appear to be both effectively ordered and beautiful. The brusquely painted, angular, black, linear structure serves as a kind of

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skeletal framework for the composition while subtle blues, greens, silvers, and browns establish a background, and irregular patches of yellow and white swing rhythmically across the canvas. The variously colored shapes and lines interlace, suggesting movement in and out of a shallow space. The paint was applied with brushes, painting knives, fingers, sticks, and by being poured from the can--in short, in whatever way the artist could best achieve the effects he desired.

This work will take a most important place in The Cleveland Museum of Art's galleries among paintings by Hans Hofmann, Robert Motherwell, Franz Kline, Willem de Kooning, Arshile Gorky, Mark Rothko, Philip Guston, and other artists of the "New York School."

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